Reflection – Ethan Gotfrid

Robot companions and caregivers for seniors are a new and novel concept being introduced using today’s advanced technology. They provide the opportunity to dramatically improve quality of life and solve a myriad of issues for the world’s aging population. However, they also provide a unique set of risks and challenges which cannot be overlooked when considering their efficacy. Some of these include issues regarding lack of human connection, loss of jobs in the care industry, and issues stemming from technical bugs or glitches which when applied to caring for those who may be sick or in poor health could be fatal.

Further exploring the risks posed by this technology we get into the opportunity for rejection of the devices by older individuals who may not understand their purpose. We also have the issue of cost, with the likelihood that these robots would be far above what the average individual could afford. These costs would likely have to be subsidized in some way for mass adoption of the technology to happen. Additionally, the opportunity for accidents or issues with robots or their software open a whole new world of problems which could arise regarding the health and safety of elderly individuals. Should a robot that someone relies on for their day to day functions cease to function it could place an individuals life or safety at risk. Privacy also poses a major concern in regards to having a device in the home with sensors, telemetry, and cameras it would require regulation in place to prevent data from being leaked or viewed by third parties. The capacity for these devices to understand or deal with the complicated needs of the elderly are beyond current technical limitations of even advanced AI technology and would require further development to be feasible.

Despite these risks there are many possible improvements and problems which could be solved through the use of robot caregivers. Loneliness and isolation prove to be one of the largest issues facing the aging population as they may not have family or loved ones nearby or at all, so the robot caregiver would be able to provide much needed stimulation and socialization for these individuals. The robot companions would be capable of providing entertainment and even some degree of connection for seniors. They would also be able to help with household tasks and chores such as cleaning, cooking, or even helping those who have mobility problems, thus increasing personal independence for those who wish to stay in their own homes as opposed to being placed in care facilities.

The technology has a long ways to come before reaching a point of maturity at which it would be possible for these benefits to be realized. Despite this, the benefits of the technology will likely outweigh the risks as the population continues to age. Many of the associated risks are solvable problems that with enough time and resources allocated can be overcome.